

Coffee stains and jet engines

Several years ago, a CEO of a profitable airline (remember those days?) made quite a memorable statement.

In a speech before a group of business leaders, he made the point of how customers correlate certain items with airline safety. For instance, he mentioned that "coffee stains on a seat could get a passenger to wonder about the maintenance of the plane's engines."

You could hear a number of people in the audience chuckle at such a thought, while others raised eyebrows of fascination.

This airline CEO's point was really very simple. Customers might judge product reliability, safety, etc., based on factors apparently unrelated to the actual service or item in question. In his particular example, the plane's engines might be perfect, but a passenger might question the airline if it could not even maintain the cleanliness of its passengers' seats.

A few jobs ago, I worked at a health care facility in town. We took several patient satisfaction surveys throughout my eight-year tenure. Interestingly enough, quality was often viewed by patients in terms of physicians' "bedside manner," wait time for appointments, cleanliness of the exam room, friendliness of the staff and correct invoices.

Rarely was "getting better" a determinant of the perception of health care quality!

Now, we all know that coffee stains on a passenger seat do not affect jet engines and that patient "wait time" does not mend a broken arm. But there are great lessons to be learned from customers. Though you may have the best product or service around, your organization might not be paying attention to some of the other "cues" identified by customers that affect a buying decision.

Are current and potential customers seeing your organization's "music match its dance?" Think about all of the opportunities to make an excellent business impression. From your lobby and your staff, to the vehicles transporting your goods and services — each should match up with all the wonderful images and words in your organization's marketing literature or website.



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For your customers and prospective customers, take a look at "wait time," your telephone "on-hold" recordings, the cleanliness of your organization's lobby and parking lot, and even the signage and business cards.

Are you and your team sending consistent "messages" about your organization's ability to perform?

And, don't forget your employees as they are your internal customers. For employees and prospective employees, are your employment policies, compensation and benefit programs, physical working conditions, and management's leadership matching up with the promise to provide a great workplace?

Perhaps it's time to consider conducting on-going customer and employee engagement surveys. You may be surprised at what really matters to your employees and customers.

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St Jude Med	STJ	40.97	-2.98	-6.8	-0.4
Penn West Petrol	PWE	18.11	-1.40	-7.2	-12.2
Juniper Networks	JNPR	21.25	-1.62	-7.1	-0.6

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"Sweating the small stuff" and paying attention to detail can make or break decisions about customer purchases or attracting top talent.

Great customer service only happens if you are successful at finding and keeping terrific employees. In this increasingly challenging business climate, organizational success is hap-

pening to those companies who understand this relationship. So, if you have employees that are ensuring your company's "coffee stains" are cleaned up, your organization is probably flying high. If not, then your business might never really get off the ground.

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